

Nový Hlavák

New Main Station District

Competitive Dialogue Procurement Procedure

Tender documentation

P06.1 User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague

Capital City of Prague
Správa železnic, state organization
Prague Public Transit Company, joint-stock company

&
Prague Institute of Planning and Development, contributory organisation



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Introduction

The area of the Vrchlického sady Park confirms what can be said about urban public space in general – its current use is characterised by a number of changing, diverse and often inconsistent functions. We work with this defined urban space as a shared scene emerging from a network of social and material relations.

We can think of urban parks as socio-biological organisms. The park is a place where the functioning of urban society and the natural element that is often so scarce in the city are connected. Every park is not only a natural ecosystem but also a social ecosystem. In our social and anthropological research, we therefore draw on concepts that approach parks as shared spaces. The park features should bring users together, while at the same time providing places where individual user groups can be left alone, undisturbed. A crucial factor for the further development of the urban park environment is to maintain its diversity, i.e. to care for that diversity.¹

We consider the direct identification of the habits and needs of the users of the Vrchlického sady Park to be a necessary phase of the architectural dialogue, which includes a focus on the involvement of civil society in the debate on the development of the city. The contribution of the social and anthropological approach of the Anthropictures, z.s. research studio can therefore be seen primarily in the fact that, thanks to field research, we have the opportunity to observe the functioning of the city and talk to many people who would probably never come to any future planning meeting.

The presented output is the result of the first part of the research (December 2019 – January 2020), which follows previous research² and is part of the schedule of activities that precede the competitive architectural dialogue, which is the responsibility of the Prague Institute of Planning and Development.

The key activity of the first research part was the identification of local target groups and observation of their spatial habits – territorial (re)production of space. The list of target groups below is based on the identification of the groups actually present in the environment. The map of interest groups will then serve as a basis for designing a specific course of action in the follow-up participatory activities.

Methodology used

- participant observation
- informal conversations with residents directly in the park and the connecting corridors
- go-along talks
- semi-structured interviews
- visual data
 - photo documentation focusing on the public space and activities of users of the Vrchlického sady Park and the adjacent surroundings
 - maps representing the relations of local actors to the defined area

The research team spent approximately 190 man-hours in the park area during the period from 1 December 2019 to 15 January 2020. The combination of the aforesaid qualitative methods was

¹ Low, S. M., Taplin, D., and Scheld, S. (2005). *Rethinking Urban Parks: Public space and cultural diversity*. New York: New York University Press.

² “Research on interventions in public spaces burdened in a similar way as the Vrchlického sady Park and the Main Railway Station area” that was carried out for Prague 1 by the anthropological research studio Anthropictures, z.s. in the period of September and October 2019.

chosen to capture the context that serves to understand the social relations, ties and activities in the Vrchlického sady Park. The field data were then subjected to qualitative analysis, the interim results of which are presented in this report.

Characteristics of the space

“Just the Main Railway Station, no park.”³

“It is my route to and from work, nothing else.”⁴

“The only park far and wide.”⁵

The Vrchlického sady Park is a problematic, multi-layered, ambiguous and paradoxical space. It is associated with a multitude of (often contradictory) ideas, feelings and names, as well as activities and practices that often contradict the official operating rules.

How should we even describe the space of the Vrchlického sady Park? Is it an actual park or something else? If we look, for example, at the map of Prague present in all metro stations, the Vrchlického sady Park is not depicted in green like other parks, but in white as a kind of indeterminate area. In the testimonies of our communication partners, the Vrchlického sady Park was mostly perceived as either a “park”, “railway station”, “city centre”, “thoroughfare” or a “mixture”.

The relationship where one place is characterised by barriers (uninhabitability) and protection and security (utilitarianism) for different groups is typical of the park. In terms of local characteristics, the Vrchlického sady Park is a dialogical and territorially produced space.

At the same time, it should be noted that the space is not formed only by the habits and needs of its users, but also by the fragments of material structures that occur within it. The overall functioning of the space is influenced not only by human activities but also by how the space is designed and physically shaped.

It is a meeting place for different social groups. The most significant interest groups there are those who use the space for transit and more or less only pass through it or often use it as a “waiting area” for trains or a “smoking area” or as a public toilet. The second distinct group is the people we refer to as the “locals”.⁶ On the part of actors who have different values in relation to the space, the “locals” are often perceived as a group of people who are in the way. In the narratives of the travelling public, it is mostly because of the “locals” that the park is viewed as a stigmatised, unclean and dangerous place. We see the existence of “civic initiatives” that are present in the space as a sign of the openness of the space.

There is also currently only one area in the Vrchlického sady Park that is explicitly separated and reserved for only one actor group, and that is the playground. However, there are also areas that are not separated explicitly, but rather on the basis of the experience that all the actors gain by moving around the space and getting to know it. Based on that experience, some areas are only used by certain actors or actor groups. These areas continuously come to existence and disappear again. If

³ Quote by one of the communication partners of the research, about 60 years old, walking from the tram stop to the railway station

⁴ Quote by one of the communication partners of the research, about 40 years old, walking to the train

⁵ Quote by one of the communication partners of the research, about 45 years old, dog owner

⁶ We refer to a group of “long-term” park users as the “locals”. These are people who spend hours a day in the park on average, without working there. Most often they are homeless people or simply people who occupy the local benches in the long term. For the “locals”, the park is an important place for meeting friends and acquaintances as well as social workers and services.

such areas exist, we consider them a sign of the closed or impenetrable nature of the space. In this text we refer to them as problematic areas or spaces.

The Vrchlického sady Park is an area around the railway station and is therefore closely connected to the station hall. The transition between the space outside, i.e. the park space, and the space inside, i.e. the station hall, is smooth and functional. This functional transition is used by people waiting for trains, municipal police officers, security service employees and those passing through the hall on their way to the metro station and vice versa, as well as by the “locals” who come to the hall to warm up in winter, and also by pigeons, for which the transition is rather more problematic.

The aspect of temporality of the space is also strongly present in the actors’ statements and our interpretations, both temporality in the sense of historical development and temporality in the sense of seasonal changes. From the point of view of historical development, the situation in the Vrchlického sady Park in the post-revolutionary period is perceived as mostly improving. The actors’ testimonies show that the number of vaguely defined corners and enterprises is decreasing, the sanitary situation in the area is improving, and the number of people using addictive substances and pursuing criminal acts is reducing. In terms of seasonality, the perception of the space as more problematic in the summertime, when the number of the “locals” occupying the benches and the mess that the cleaning services cannot manage to dispose of, is present in the narratives of some of our communication partners.

Due to the fact that the space is inhomogeneous and ambiguous in terms of its users, and also due to the significant presence of socio-economically vulnerable groups that tend to be neglected in official participation processes and thus become voiceless in this respect, we perceive the Vrchlického sady Park as a space that is very sensitive to any kind of intervention.

Actor groups and activities

We identified several important actor groups in the research (see the table below).

The left column lists the main target groups, stakeholders and actors, which are linked to an outline (right column) of the knowledge on the daily life of the park in a possible participatory process.

The table is intended to make clear the relationship between the local park users and the institutions and services that influence the operation of the park. The table deliberately does not indicate the precise horizontal links between the target group and the benefit characteristics, as these cannot be fixedly linked to the individual target groups. This means that individuals may belong to more than one target group, and this is based on their situational activities. Similarly, the benefit characteristics are also linked.

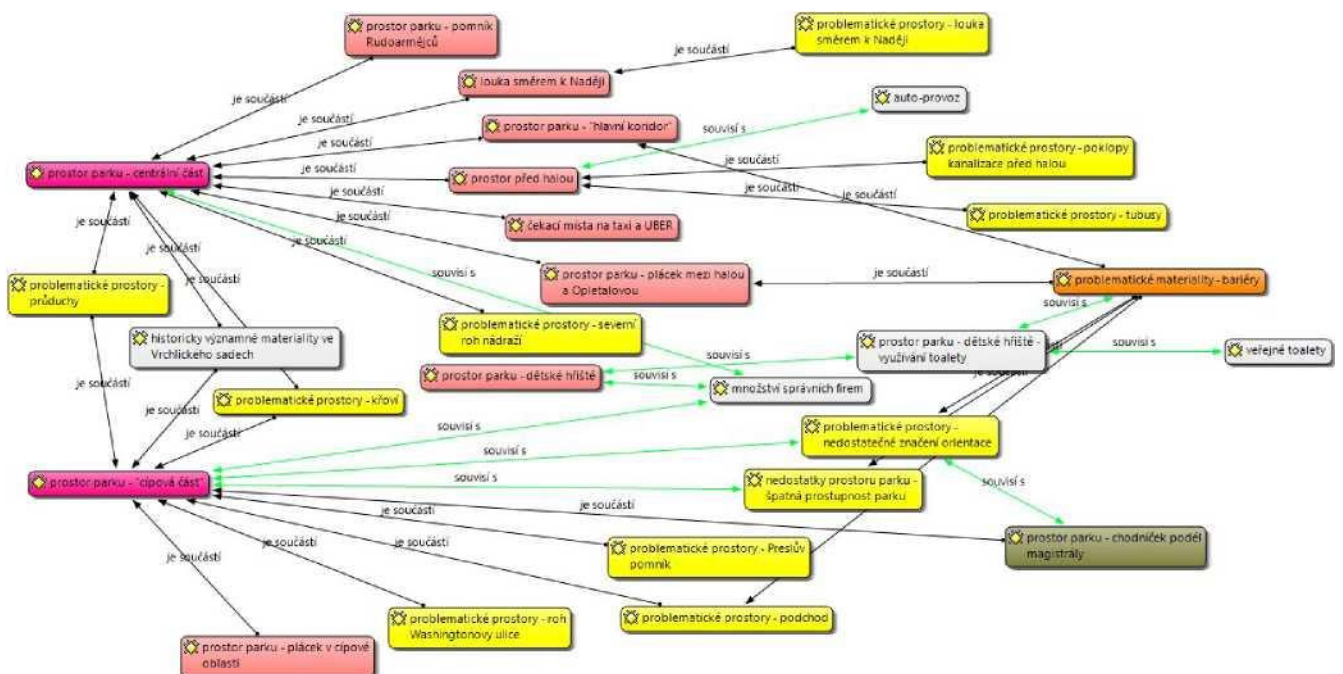
actor groups	contribution to the participatory process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people passing through (most often from the tram stop to train or metro or elsewhere on foot) - people waiting for trains - vulnerable groups (users of illegal substances, homeless people, socially vulnerable people coming for work) - dog owners and dog walkers (mostly local residents) - local residents - children with parents and children from kindergartens - civic initiative (citizens distributing food, caravan distributing food on Christmas Eve, Wander Bar) - business activities (Wander Bar, snack stand, newsagent's, restaurants in the station hall) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - define (name and use, but also materially shape) the space in a specific way - determine to a large extent the character of the space by their habits - assess the safety and permeability of the space - highlight the qualities and shortcomings of the space - focus on the condition of pathways, equipment and furnishings, greenery - have visions of how the space should look and function - perceive and shape the history of the place - the groups that spend more time in the space (vulnerable groups, dog walkers, local residents, civic initiatives and entrepreneurs) have a relationship to the space and care about it in some way - vulnerable groups tend to be excluded from the participation process, despite being "at home" in the space
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social services (Hope, Sananim, Dropin, Progressive, R-R) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - create a "social space" that is safe for vulnerable groups, but also for other users, by taking care of vulnerable groups (needle exchange, needle removal, programme for vulnerable actors – cleaning of the Vrchlického sady Park) - know the space and have a lot of information about it, they understand it in an "expert way" - communicate with the administration of the area – they can act as a kind of intermediary between the groups at risk and the administrative authorities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vrchlického sady Park administration (security services – municipal and state police, security services, security cameras; Vrchlického sady Park administrator, Prague City Hall, Správa železnic (Railways Administration), Municipal District of Prague 1 and Municipal District of Prague 2 – upper part of the area – roof of the station hall, parking lot, Hope; City Hall, cleaning services – Transport Research Centre (CDV), Sady a lesy (Parks and Forests)) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintain the Vrchlického sady Park area - oversee the safety and cleanliness of the area - make decisions on changes in the space - participate in the space, among other things, by means of the operating rules displayed on signs in the park - have the power to enforce the operating rules - determine the property relations in the area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fauna (rodents, pigeons, dogs) 	

Interpretation of maps and relations to the space

The multilayered spatial relations of the Vrchlického sady Park are depicted on a mental map.

The Vrchlického sady Park is divided into two sections. The central part and the tip are imaginatively separated by their different characters and partly also by the different activities that take place there. The mental map also depicts problematic areas, whether due to their impenetrability, a difficult layout or pollution.



prostor parku - centrální část	park area – central part
je součástí	is part of
problematiké prostory - průduchy	problematic areas – vents
historicky významné materiality ve Vrchlického sadech	historically significant materialities in the Vrchlického sady Park

problematické prostory - křoví	problematic areas – bushes
prostor parku - "cípová část"	park area – "tip section"
prostor parku - plácek v cípové oblasti	park area – patch in the tip section
prostor parku - pomník Rudarmějců	park area – monument to the Red Army
louka směrem k Naději	meadow in the direction of Hope
prostor parku - "hlavní koridor"	park area – "main corridor"
prostor před halou	space in front of the hall
čekací místa na taxi a UBER	waiting places for taxis and UBER
souvisí s	related to
prostor parku - plácek mezi halou a Opletalovou	park area – the place between the station hall and Opletalova Street
problematické prostory - severní roh nádraží	problematic areas – north corner of the railway station
prostor parku - dětské hřiště	park area – playground
problematické prostory - roh Washingtonovy ulice	problematic areas – corner of Washingtonova Street
problematické prostory - Preslův pomník	problematic areas – Presl Monument
problematické prostory - podchod	problematic areas – underpass
množství správních firem	number of management companies
nedostatky prostoru parku špatná prostupnost parku	deficiencies of the park area, poor permeability of the park
problematické prostory - louka směrem k Naději	problematic areas – meadow in the direction of Hope
auto-provoz	car transport
problematické prostory - poklopy kanalizace před halou	problematic areas – sewer covers in front of the station hall
problematické prostory - tubusy	problematic areas – tubes
problematické materiality - bariéry	problematic materialities – barriers
prostor parku - dětské hřiště - využívání toalety	park area – playground – use of toilets
veřejné toalety	public toilets

The **central part**⁷ is characterised by high pedestrian fluctuation, especially during the rush hours when people go to and from work. Often people from vulnerable groups (homeless people, substance users) spend time there and use the park as a meeting place.

The **space in front of the station hall** has the character of a square. It is a place that serves as a meeting point for different groups (people waiting or passing through, vulnerable groups). There were stalls there at Christmas time, which only added to the character. This area is also important for the park administration; it is a spacious place where cars can go, so we often noticed police cars, cleaning vehicles, ambulances, etc.

The **playground** area is specific because of its clear boundaries and "fortification" in relation to the rest of the park. The playground has the effect of an "oasis of calm" on its users. On weekdays, groups of children from nearby kindergartens and also parents with children and often people with children waiting for the train come there.

In the central part there are also places of business activity – a **pizza stand** and a **newsagent's**. During the interviews, the vendors described the problem of everyday theft, which they said could not be prevented.

The **tip section** has a different character than the central part. There is not as much fluctuation of pedestrians walking through and waiting for trains there. It is often used by dog owners. The tip part is also characterised by the activities of social service providers (**Sananim, z.ú.** and **Drop In, o.p.s.**), who focus on vulnerable groups (especially substance users). There is a higher prevalence of substance users in the tip area, but since there is not as much fluctuation of people passing through, there are more "hidden" places that provide opportunities for injecting drugs. This is also related to the activities of social service providers who provide injection material exchange as part of their outreach

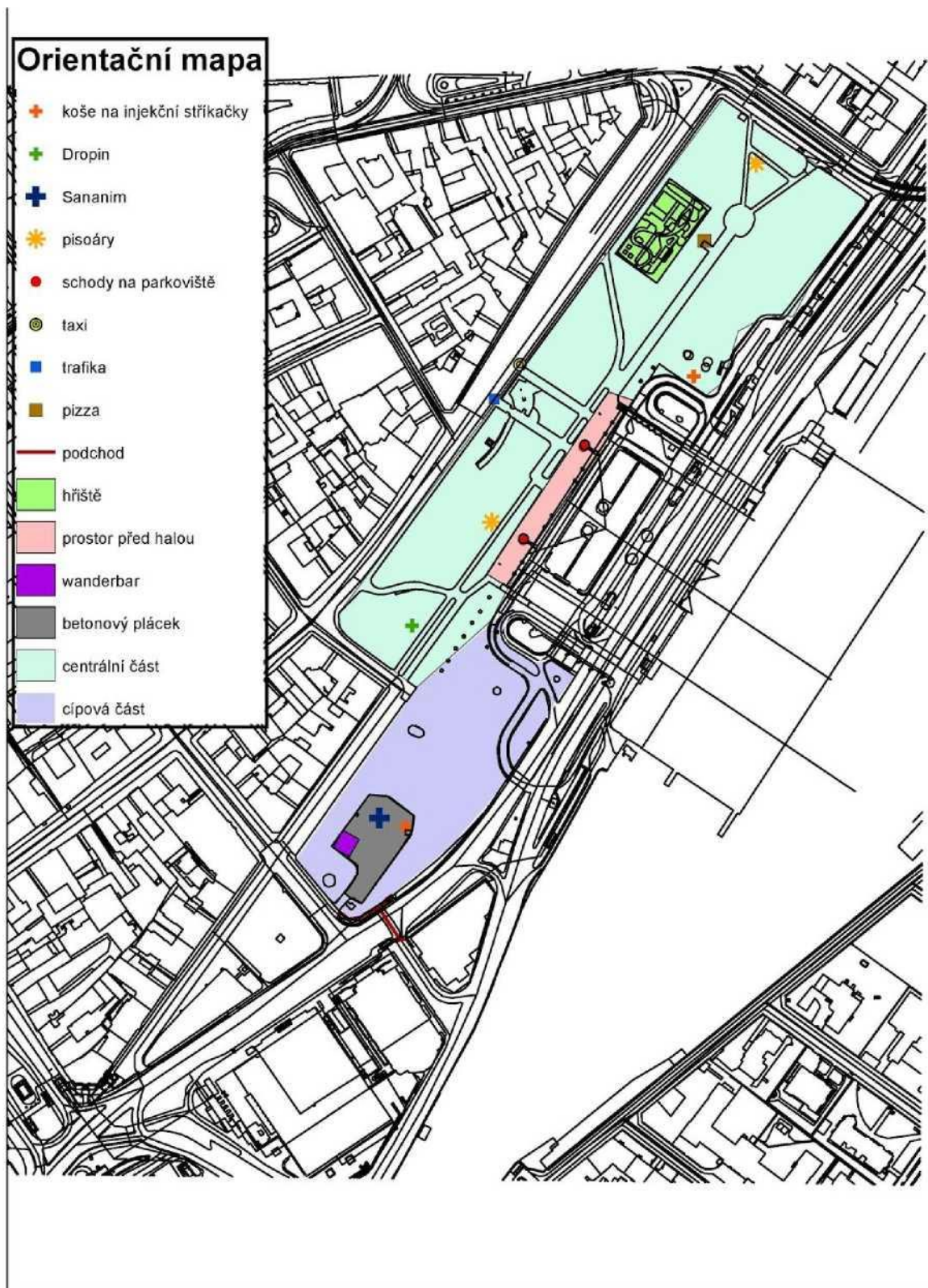
⁷ For better orientation, the orientation map shows bold highlighted parts and points of the Vrchlického sady Park.

programmes. In addition, there are two **injection needle bins** in the park area.

In the summer of 2019, the **Wander Bar**, whose operators organised cultural events (especially concerts), operated on the **concrete patch** for the first season. This space is also often rented out for film shoots.

One of the most pressing problems in the Vrchlického sady Park is the lack of toilets. There are public toilets in the station hall, but they cost a fee of twenty Czech crowns, which makes them unaffordable for some actors. A large part of the park is thus used for urination and defecation, which degrades the area in sanitary terms. Recently, **urinals** have been added to the park area, but their capacity is insufficient and they can only be used by men. A public toilet is also located in the playground area.

For easier orientation, there is an orientation map, where different parts and significant points of the Vrchlického sady Park are plotted.



Orientační mapa	Orientation map
koše na injekční stříkačky	injection needle bins
Dropin	Dropin

Sananim	Sananim
pisoáry	urinals
schody na parkoviště	stairs to the parking lot
taxi	taxis
trafika	newsagent's
pizza	pizza
podchod	underpass
hřiště	playground
prostor před halou	space in front of the hall
wanderbar	wanderbar
betonový plácek	concrete patch
centrální část	central part
cípková část	tip part

Barriers in the Vrchlického sady Park

The space of the Vrchlického sady Park is full of material barriers that prevent smooth and pleasant movement. As such, the area is disparate, with disjointed and often neglected furnishings (e.g. broken kerbs). The furnishings and materiality of the space (like the social dimension) have many layers; the space looks as if many elements have been introduced over time without a common concept (e.g., the various fences that enclose the lawn⁸). The barrier map shows the most problematic material barriers, and it is not exhaustive. Each point is characterised below and accompanied by photographs.

1. Fence separating the Vrchlického sady Park area from the Hlavní nádraží (Main Railway Station) tram stop

The tram stop is separated by a fence that clearly defines the end of the park area. People at the tram stop thus do not have the opportunity to make their wait more pleasant in the park. In addition, the fence is in very poor condition. It is cut through in several places, and those passing through use that as a shortcut, showing that the fence is an unnecessary barrier.



2. Fences enclosing the lawn in front of the station hall

The area in front of the station hall is connected to the road by small patches of grass. Some of them are bordered by fences so that it is impossible to pass through. The photo shows the partition between the fenced and unfenced parts. Due to the busy nature of this area, people need to walk straight through. The fences keep the grass green, but it is contrary to the needs of people passing through.



3. Path by the Wilson Monument

There is a nice wide path around the Wilson Monument, but unfortunately there is a high kerb at the beginning, which makes it difficult for people in wheelchairs, for example. At the same time, the path does not lead anywhere and for this reason it is followed by a beaten track.



⁸ In particular, the barriers preventing passage are related to the official prohibition of going on the grass, but this is not respected and we have not encountered any enforcement of this rule.

4. Fence at Jeruzalémská Street

Jeruzalémská Street is one of the main corridors used by people walking to the Main Railway Station from the Jindřišská tram stop. This street is connected to the pedestrian crossing over Opletalova Street, but it is not directly connected to the Vrchlického sady Park. Pedestrians simply cut their way across the lawn. To prevent this, a neglected and damaged fence is placed there. Like the fences in front of the station hall, it is intended to protect the lawn from pedestrians. The fence is an unnecessary barrier that impedes passage.



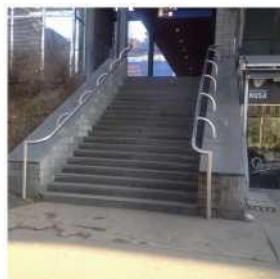
5. Railings in Opletalova Street



In a part of Opletalova Street, the Vrchlického sady Park is separated by railings. This element is particularly contrasting with the narrow footpath leading along the main road (point 8 on the map). From a safety perspective, a railing at the location would be desirable and understandable. In Opletalova Street, however, such an element looks random and without a clear concept; it only hinders the passage to the grassy area.

6. Stairs connecting the area in front of the station hall with the parking lot and stairs leading to the side parts of the railway station

It is possible to get to the parking lot on the roof of the railway station from the hall by elevator, but the elevator has a small capacity. Two stair “towers” lead directly from the area in front of the station hall to the parking lot. These are unpleasant places that can provide space for illegal activities (e.g. drug dealing).



There are also stairs leading from the area in front of the station hall to the side parts of the railway station (where there are, for example, public toilets, taxis and a police station), which can also be accessed from inside the hall. The stairs are a faster option. They are often used by pedestrians with suitcases. They are a barrier for them as they have to carry the suitcases by hand.

7. Passage from the upper parking lot to the tip of the park

The parking lot on the roof of the railway station is not easily passable for pedestrians. We often watched people with suitcases walking from the parking lot to the tip area. The intensity of the passage is evidenced by the beaten tracks. However, the parking lot is separated from the park by car ramps and massive railings, which creates a significant barrier.



8. Footpath along the main road

From the station parking lot, pedestrians often walk directly along the main road towards Wenceslas Square. The passage from the parking lot to the sidewalk is very problematic and constitutes a barrier. The sidewalk itself is very narrow and insufficient, which is evident from the trampled grass.

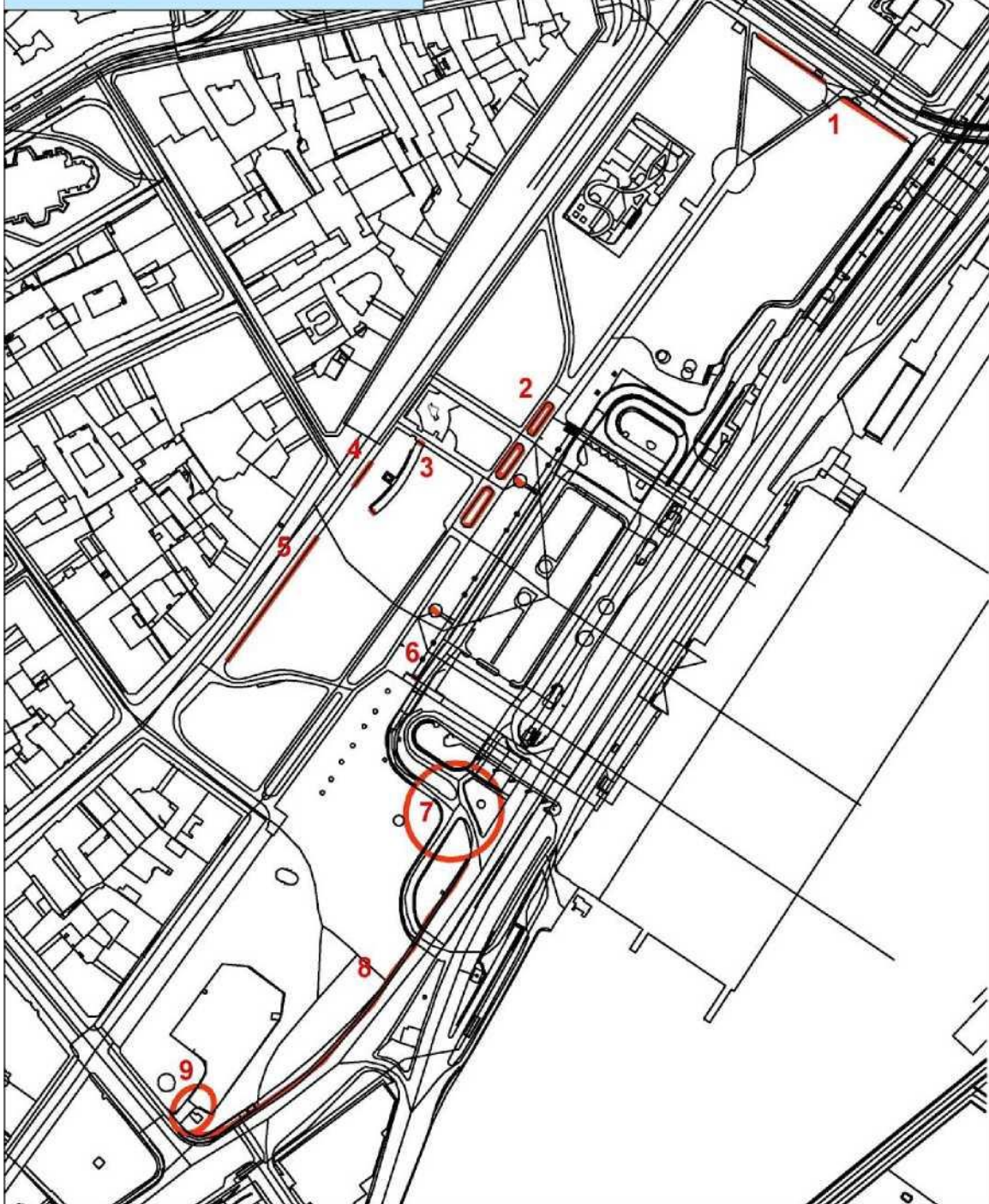


9. Gate to the concrete patch

The concrete patch at the tip of the Vrchlického sady Park is reached by a path fenced with a railing and blocked by a high gate. The gate is likely to prevent unauthorised passage and parking of cars. But it also impedes the free movement of pedestrians. There are beaten tracks leading to the concrete area.



Mapa bariér



Mapa bariér

Map of barriers

Map of footpaths

As part of the research, we documented and recorded the footpaths. The footpath map shows the necessary passages for easy movement through the space. We understand the *footpaths* as formed by the passing actors to shorten their way, replacing the non-existent “official” paths. The *locals’ footpaths* are a subcategory of footpaths. These are the routes that actors of vulnerable groups use to get to the areas of the park that they use to meet, sleep or urinate (defecate).

The footpaths of the “locals” lead to more polluted areas or to places where people from vulnerable groups gather. We perceive them as different from the general footpaths, as they tell us more about the specific spatial behaviour of actors of the groups at risk in the Vrchlického sady Park. Those people go to places where they meet away from others, to places used instead of toilets because they have no other option, or to places where they spend the nights.

The footpaths are largely related to barriers in the space. Pedestrians often shorten their way, and the park administration responds by trying to protect the greenery, which often conflicts with the needs of pedestrians.



1. footpath next to the playground



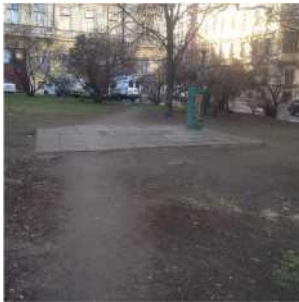
2. footpath near Jeruzalémská Street (related to barrier 4)



3. footpath connecting to the path by the Wilson Monument (related to barrier 3)



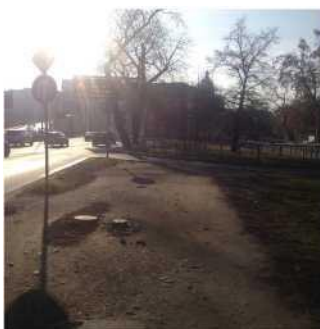
4. beaten track between the station hall and the road (related to barrier 2)



5. footpath leading to the corner of Washingtonova Street



6. footpath leading from the parking lot to the tip part (related to barrier 7)



7. footpath from the parking lot along the pavement next to the main road to the monument of J. S. Presl (related to barrier 8)



8. footpaths connecting the concrete patch and the path



9. footpaths at the entrance to the tip section (related to barrier 9)



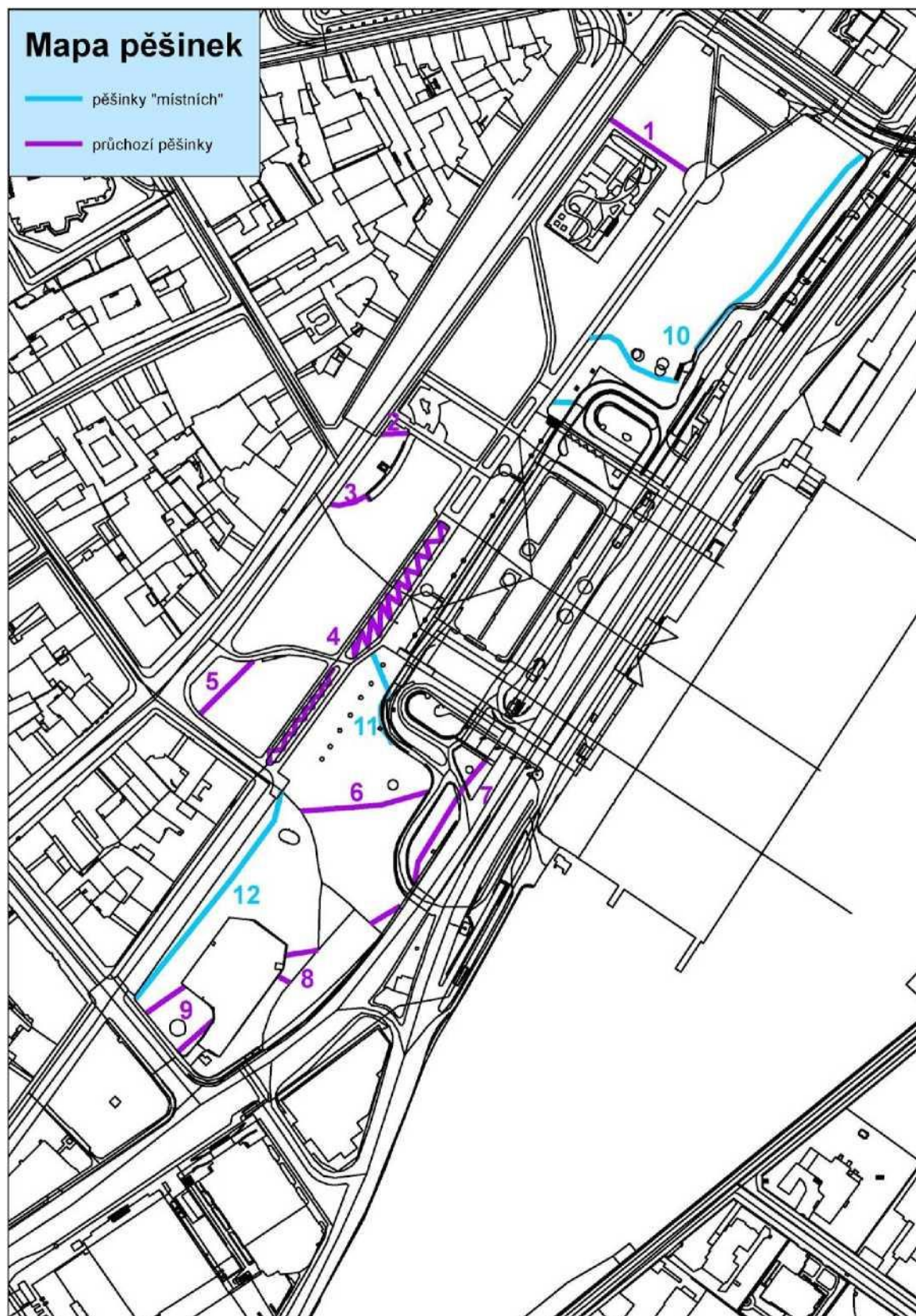
10. footpath to the problematic area next to the station hall and a footpath leading from that area through the fence at the tram stop in the direction of Hope (related to barrier 1)



11. footpath leading to the problematic area next to the station hall



12. footpath leading behind the concrete patch towards the central part of the park



Mapa pěšinek	Map of footpaths
pěšinky "místních"	footpaths of the "locals"
průchozí pěšinky	general footpaths

Follow-up research phases

The phase aimed at verifying the existing analytical conclusions and completing data that are important for further steps in the revitalisation of the Vrchlického sady Park will be carried out in accordance with the time schedule for the preparation of the competitive architectural dialogue in the months of March – July 2020.

The final output of the research will be a textual analysis of the environment and its functioning in relation to the development of the space, in the scope of 30 standard pages, which will describe the target and interest groups and specific motivations, practices, needs and follow-up recommendations for the participatory process.